

# **Beyond War: A New Way of Thinking**

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Life is at a crossroads. One direction leads to death, destruction, and possibly the extinction of life on earth. The other direction opens new possibilities for the human species; a world where all people have the opportunity to satisfy their basic human needs, where life has meaning and purpose.

In the past forty years, the human species has accumulated more knowledge of our physical world, more understanding of the inner dimension of the human mind, more ability to effect change than we have gained through all our previous history. But that knowledge has not created the utopia we might have hoped for.

Instead, we find the survival of everything we value at risk. Given the enormity of this challenge, piecemeal solutions, reactions to symptoms, limited perspectives will no longer suffice. The preservation of life now requires an enormous leap in human functioning.

The transformation needed now is of greater magnitude than any change since the dawn of consciousness. The renowned historian Arnold Toynbee chronicled the rise and fall of all the world's major civilizations. He concluded from his lifetime of study that there have been two nodal points in human history. (1) The first was when we crossed the threshold from

instinct to self-consciousness nearly 100,000 years ago. The second is occurring now, when our survival requires we cross a threshold equally large. This change cannot wait for thousands, or even hundreds, of years. It must be completed in this generation.

### *Possibility*

Is it possible for us to change? Our experience tells us it is. Our ability to change has made us the dominant species on the planet.

Physically we are very ordinary. We are not the strongest or the fastest species; we cannot fly, we cannot breathe underwater; our offspring are quite incapable of fending for themselves for many years.

But the capacity of the human mind has enabled us to overcome these physical limitations. We have used our minds to probe the secrets of nature. With knowledge, we have accomplished what once seemed impossible. We have learned to fly, to live underwater. We can create artificial environments that enable us to see at night, be warm in the cold, be cool in the heat.

We inherit the lifetimes of experimentation and learning of those who went before us. We accumulate knowledge and pass it on to others. We communicate through time and space. We deal with abstract concepts. We think about the past and the future.

In accordance with the laws of nature, we have changed the world we live in. How have we done this? It has always been the same process: commitment to a goal and the process of discovering how to achieve that goal. In 1950, Jonas Salk committed himself to find a cure for polio. In 1961, John Kennedy committed his nation to put a man on the moon and bring him home safely by the end of the decade. Neither could “prove” at the time that their goal was possible. But their commitment, and their willingness to be open, to discover, enabled them to accomplish these goals.

Discovery requires that we adopt a unique relationship with reality: one where nature “tells” us how it works. Salk did not decide that his vaccine would be effective against polio, he discovered it. He developed possibilities, tested them experimentally, validated or rejected them. The Apollo scientists did not decide what effect the moon’s gravity would have on the lunar landing module; they, too, discovered what would and would not work.

By applying this same process, we can work together, East and West, North and South, to build a world beyond war. We can commit ourselves to this most essential goal. We can dedicate ourselves to a search for the truth of how to accomplish it. We can discipline ourselves to disregard our preconceptions in the face of conflicting evidence. We can find the way. We can move to a new level of human functioning.

### *Knowledge*

In the last century, we have often used the process of discovery to pursue incorrect goals. We discovered the laws of nature that enabled us to make nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. We have discovered new technologies and implemented them without regard for their by-products — the hazardous wastes, the pollution of the atmosphere and the oceans, the acid rain. (2) We have created the tools of our own extinction.

Over the same time period, by applying this process of discovery to understand the fundamental purpose and direction of life, we have also learned the principles that can ensure our survival.

### *Our Journey through Time*

We know that we are products of a distant past, a past that stretches beyond the twentieth century, beyond even human history. Each of us is connected to the beginnings of time and space, energy and matter, to the beginnings of life itself. We are the end points of a living process. By examining that process, we have discovered the principles that govern survival.

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Our story begins 10 billion to 15 billion years ago. (3) The beginning of the universe - all matter, all energy compacted into one finite place at one finite time. How? No one knows. Ultimate mystery. But begin it did. And through billions of years a process unfolded: energy condensing into hydrogen, hydrogen atoms collecting to form stars, nuclear fusion building new elements. Stars being born, dying, exploding, scattering their products through space. New stars, nuclear fission producing the higher elements, molecules, and eventually our sun and the earth.

Enormous changes shaped the Earth, the formation of the oceans, the atmosphere, the continents. The beginning of life! How? Again, mystery. The growth and development of life from sophisticated molecules, to cells, to organized colonies of cells. Specialization: organs, nervous systems, primitive brains. The acceleration of change: fish, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and humans.

With the human came self-consciousness; the search began to understand the universe of which we are part. Language, tools, and communication became the foundation for agriculture, cities, and civilizations. More and more knowledge: religion, science, music, poetry. More and more change:

no longer solely geological and biological, but now initiated by the creativity, the energy, the power of the human mind. (4,5)

We stand at the end of a chain of indescribable length and enormous complexity. We are not the creators of this system; we are a finite, limited part in an infinite web of relationships. Our continued existence depends upon the same principles that have governed life for billions of years. Survival has always been the goal of life. No creature, no species, could have been aware of the role it was playing in the development of life. But, driven by an instinctual will to live, each played a critical part in the unfolding process.

Success or failure was always measured by the same objective standard: an ability to meet the changes in the external environment. If a creature or a species was able to do so, it survived. If not, it became extinct. (6) For the human species in the nuclear age, the standard is the same. We changed our own environment; we unlocked the power to destroy all life. To survive we must respond to that change.

It has been the response to change that has propelled life forward. As when plant life was in danger of poisoning its environment with oxygen, life evolved to animal form and began to breathe that oxygen. As the seas, lakes, and rivers were drying up, life moved onto the land. As when the forests were disappearing and the savannahs were expanding, life moved out of the trees and walked erect. Without these environmental pressures, there would have been no movement, no dynamism, no change. Each change, in turn, created new possibilities for the future. (4,5)

We are the inheritors of billions of years of successful adaptation to changes in the environment. We are unique in our ability to fulfill or deny our heritage. No other species has ever had the power to end the process of evolution. No other species has ever had the ability to consciously participate in its unfolding. This generation will decide if that magnificent process is to continue. We owe a debt to the past; we have a responsibility to the future.

#### *Stages in the Journey*

As we look back upon that enormous sweep of time, we can see there have been distinct stages in our journey.

From the beginning of time, until the advent of self-consciousness, there was a fundamental unity in the universe. There was constant differentiation, from pure energy, to energy and mass, to elements and combinations of elements, but always the relationships were defined by the fundamental laws of physics. With life came more variety, which also functioned in an unconscious, instinctive way that maintained the intrinsic unity of the whole system.

With the human being and self-consciousness came the idea of separation from the system. The human mind became the only thing we know of in the universe that could violate the principle of unity. We could choose. We could view ourselves as separate from each other and from the rest of the universe.

We could no longer depend solely upon instinct to survive. We needed to understand the system in which we lived and we began the process of reductionistic thinking. With our minds, we divided, isolated, and categorized pieces of reality in order to discover cause and effect relationships. Our discoveries enabled us to develop tools, shelter, agriculture, and transportation.

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For most of our history, there were relatively few of us scattered around the planet, and we had little impact on the whole system. We were able to ignore the by-products of our material progress. We could deforest the land, deplete the soil, pollute the rivers, and go to war with each other. Individually and as groups of individuals we paid a price for those actions, but the system as a whole was able to replenish itself.

There are now 5 billion human beings with extraordinary technological power. Everything we do has a significant effect on everything else. We can no longer “do” and “develop” what we please. We can no longer ask ourselves “What can we do?” or “What do we want to do?” and ignore the consequences for the whole system.

Modern technology has given us a magnificent symbol of that system - a view of the Earth from space. Virtually every human being who has flown in space, whatever his or her nationality, has been deeply touched and changed by that perspective of our home.

Yuri Gagarin, the first Soviet cosmonaut, the first human in outer space, reported: “Circling the Earth ... I marveled at the beauty of our planet ... Looking at our Earth from space, what strikes me is not only the beauty of the continents .... but their closeness to one another ... their essential unity. The different parts that make up the world all merge into one whole .... How worthwhile life would be on our planet, if the people of all the continents were to really become aware of their closeness .... their common interests .... Let us safeguard and enhance this beauty - not destroy it!” (7)

An American astronaut, Russell Schweickart, lunar module pilot on Apollo 9, had similar feelings. “You look down there and you can’t imagine how many borders and boundaries you cross again and again ...

and you don't even see them. From where you see it the thing is a whole and it is so beautiful ... And there you are - hundreds of people killing each other over some imaginary line that you're not even aware of, that you can't even see ... You realize that on that small spot, that little blue-and-white thing is everything that means anything to you - all history, and music, and poetry, and art, and birth, and death, love, tears, joy, games." (8)

All of humanity now shares that picture of the earth from space. We are one human species; we live on one tiny, fragile planet suspended in the darkness of space; there is one life-support system that maintains us all. The borders and boundaries that separate us are artificial. Whatever our differences — however emotional they are, however intractable they have become, however inevitable they may seem — they are insignificant compared to what we share.

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The guiding principle of all human thought, all human activity in the nuclear age, must reflect this fundamental unity. We must realign ourselves with the direction that has carried life forward for billions of years, we must unify at a whole new level of consciousness. This is the leap that must be made by this generation.

#### *Action*

The transformation of the human species will occur one person at a time. No one can make this change for us. No one can force us. The ultimate sign of our autonomy is the choice we make as individuals; to contribute to the well-being of our whole species.

There are implications of this change in our own personal lives which will have a powerful impact on our institutions and nations.

#### *Individual Change*

Every individual has a very basic definition of who he or she is. This definition contains a set of values, standards, and loyalties which are the product of one's own life experience and the interpretations that have been made about that experience. (9) This is the individual's identity and it determines how he/she interacts with life and responds to any given situation.

To understand the nature of the shift our individual identity must undergo, it is important to set forth the two basic relationships we can have with life.

The first relationship is limited in its perception. It only sees and acts upon what is useful to maintain an existing point of view, thought, or attitude. Decisions are based on a limited self-interest: “What is best for ‘me or mine’?”, “How do ‘I’ want it to be?” The assumption is that “I can choose both the goal and employ any means I want to use in order to achieve it.”

The “I,” the “we,” that is considered in this “limited self-interest” will vary. Sometimes it will be just one person. Other times it might include family and close friends, at times the nation, or perhaps those who hold the same religious or ideological beliefs, or racial identification.

But the “me and mine” is limited; there are always many outside my definition. This limited view of the world, this artificial division of reality, is in conflict with the underlying unity of the whole system. From the perspective of the whole system, responses based upon this limited self-interest are inconsistent, inadequate, undependable, and “unrealistic.” (10) It is this limited perspective, this limited identity, that is the root cause of the many varied problems the human species faces. The long-term outcome of collective thinking of this type will be the inevitable catastrophe of nuclear war.

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The second basic relationship is inclusive and global in its perception. This relationship acknowledges that we are all part of one system. It is aligned with the value and direction of life. (10) It makes an empathetic connection to other human beings. Decisions are based upon global self-interest with longtime horizons: “What, in the long run, is best for everyone involved?” The basic assumption is that “If I choose a goal, the means must be consistent with it.” In which case, the individual’s responses are dependable, responsible, and directional. This global mode of thinking will lead to survival of life into the future.

This change to a global identification and a commitment to act accordingly has enormous implications. The individual then takes total responsibility for his/her own attitude. He/she is not preoccupied with defending existing ideas and opinions, but instead is continually engaged in a sincere search for the truth.

Violence can no longer be an optional response to even the most difficult of human situations. In a unified system, violation of another damages the whole system and therefore oneself. Those with different views cannot be seen as enemies. Diversity is viewed not as something to be eliminated, but as a source of creativity and resourcefulness.

When this change in identification occurs, there is a constancy to this attitude; it does not vary from day to day or situation to situation. The individual is truly mature, dependable, and reliable.

The process of mastering the unitive principle requires working together in real life situations with real people. This mastery does not occur overnight. It requires openness, courage, motivation, perseverance, and time. Working with others - whether in small teams, neighborhoods, communities, nations, or the world - is the transforming process. The outcome of this mastery is a profound sense of goodwill for our fellow human beings and our whole life system.

### *Collective Change*

Nations must also change. We can no longer allow our nation-states to be exempt from the moral principles that guide our personal lives. The actions of our institutions must be congruent with our individual standards.

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This change can only occur when enough individuals and enough leaders pledge themselves to build a world beyond war. There will need to be a critical mass of people in the US, the USSR, and throughout the world who have the commitment and dedication to persevere.

Some of the beginning steps are obvious. All nation-states, including the US and the USSR, must eliminate the use of violence in their foreign policies. Significant reduction or elimination of nuclear weapons will not occur as long as one nation thinks another will go to war in a crisis. All nuclear nations, especially the US and USSR, must model to each other and to the world a consistent commitment to resolve conflict without war and violence. (11,12)

The US and the USSR must begin to use the technology and resources of the arms race to help solve some of the basic problems of the Third World - the hunger, the disease, the violations of human dignity. They must work together with all nations to address the global crisis of the degradation of our life-support system.

Both nations must focus on fulfilling the aspirations of their own citizenry. This means developing a sustainable economic system that allows all people to participate productively. It means building a society where people are able to freely express ideas and opinions, to fully participate in the forging of their own destiny.



We will discover other steps as we proceed along this path toward a sustainable future. There is no valid reason that the future of all life must be in danger. There is no need for hunger and starvation on the planet; there is no need for the disease, the poverty, the ignorance. The root causes of war, of injustice, of alienation can be eliminated.

The human species has been on a journey for tens of thousands of years. We have discovered the secrets of nature. We have reaped a tremendous reward from the ability to think and to choose. But we now see the enormous price we will pay if we continue to remain separate from the direction of life. It is time for us to return home again, to the basic unity from which we came.

“... we shall not cease from exploration ... and the end of all our exploration will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

—*T. S. Eliot*  
*Four Quartets*

Building a world beyond war: It can be done. It is the destiny of this generation to do it.

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